

Heartbreak

HATTERS 3 CARDIFF CITY 3

Andy MacKenzie reports from Kenilworth Road
HATTERS suffered heartbreak on Valentine's Day after letting a 2-0 and then a 3-1 lead slip to end up drawing with promotion hopefuls Cardiff last night.

A first-half brace from Rowan Vine and a second-half own goal from Chris Barker should have seen Town close the gap on seventh placed City, but the visitors replied through two scorching Jason Koumas strikes and a Riccardo Scimeca header.

Hatters made three changes from the side that crashed to a 5-1 defeat in their last outing at Preston on Saturday.

Sol Davis came in for his first start since October in place of Keith Keane who was away on Irish Under 21 duty.

Leon Barnett replaced injured Chris Coyne and Dean Morgan came in for David Bell – also on the treatment table.

Marlon Beresford was able to continue in goal after his red card against North End was overturned after a club appeal.

The visitors bossed the early possession until Nicholls robbed Welsh international Koumas in midfield to set up an eighth minute Town move.

Town's skipper found Vine, who in turn fed Brkovic to pull back for Foley to send a half-hit sidefoot effort at Neil Alexander from 15 yards.

With Luton beginning to find their feet Vine almost latched on to a long Markus Heikkinen pass a minute later, but could only shoot at Alexander on the stretch.

Alexander had to be altogether more alert to deny the former Portsmouth man in the 21st minute, though, when he jumped to save Vine's 12-yard volley after Foley had beaten Neil Ardley in the air from Davis' lobbed pass down the left.

After twice setting his sights, Vine then found the net four minutes later as the goal Luton had been hinting at arrived.

Nicholls' free-kick from the right was half-cleared allowing Morgan to volley a right-footed cross-shot back into the area and Vine, anticipating the ball, was on hand to glance into the far corner.

With the crowd still settling down from the opener, Vine then grabbed his second 60 seconds later.

The chance seemed to have gone for the 23-year-old at first as he mis-hit Edwards' lobbed pass on the edge of the six yard box, but as Vine fell he managed to connect second time around to send the ball



Referee: Andy Woolmer (North'ton)
Attendance: 7,826 (447 Cardiff)

squirring past Alexander. Edwards then tested Alexander before Cardiff had their first shot on target in the 34th minute.

But it was Luton who should have grabbed a third when Brkovic tricked his way past Darren Purse only to curl tamely at Alexander.

Hatters appeared to be in control in the second period, but a moment of magic from Koumas 10 minutes in put Cardiff back in the hunt when he intercepted Edwards' pass from defence and unleashed a ferocious right-footed effort that arrowed into the top corner from 25 yards.

The two-goal cushion was soon restored just after the hour when the lively Vine beat two players before his cross was sliced past his own keeper by Chris Barker. The ball may already have been over the line, but Brkovic smashed it home just to make sure.

Cardiff came again in the 65th minute as Ardley's free-kick dropped to Cameron Jerome, who saw his fierce effort superbly saved by Beresford.

There was nothing Beresford could do six minutes later when Cardiff again reduced the gap as Scimeca jumped to tower a header into the bottom corner from Ardley's cross and two minutes later Town had a let off when Joe Ledley smashed against the bar.

Then a long-range effort by Koumas pulled Cardiff level.



IT'S THERE! Rowan Vine celebrates after scoring Hatters' opening goal last night

Watson-Challis' new claim

HATTERS' former owners have sensationally stated that they are still working on a plan to provide Luton Town with a new stadium – despite having relinquished control of the club nearly three years ago.

Club life president Mike Watson-Challis and his wife Sheila claim that a ground can still be built on land which they own at Junction 10 of the M1.

And they also say they have another site ready to be built upon within Luton should they need it.

In an email from Florida, Mrs Watson-Challis told the News-Gazette: "Our plans to provide Luton Town with a grand new sta-

dium are still in place and progressing, despite delays caused for over a year by people who are more concerned with other issues than the good of the club.

"It is costing our family £250,000 a year to retain the Junction 10 site. The question to supporters is, why should we continue to do this?"

"In the event that we are not able to build at Junction 10, we have another site in Luton to consider which, the council have confirmed, could definitely be completed before (the club's proposed new stadium at) Junction 12.

"We could sell our site for £5million tomorrow and walk away from

our interest in Luton Town Football Club. But I still hope to see my husband, now 82, walk up the steps and cut the ribbon at the new Luton Gateway Stadium."

Hatters themselves are targeting a new stadium at Junction 12 of the M1 after saying Luton Airport's draft master plan for expansion sterilised Junction 10 from a planning point of view. Chairman Bill Tomlins has promised more details 'by the end of the month'.

Meanwhile in a separate twist, this newspaper has been told that negotiations are continuing on behind-the-scenes changes that will change the direction of the club.